

2010 Report to the Governor

Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council

Mission: The Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council advises and works with the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to improve policies, programs, delivery of services to consumers, and methods for reaching potential consumers and employers.



Message from the Council:



The Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council advises and works with the Montana Vocational Rehabilitation (MVR) Program to improve policies, programs, delivery of services to program participants, and methods for reaching potential participants and employers. To that end, we actively promoted and supported the funding and operation of MVR through many activities across the state this past year. This report highlights many of those activities.

The dignity, pride and sense of purpose gained through employment of individuals with disabilities are incalculable. The financial gain afforded MVR program participants and the corresponding tax and other benefits to Montana are significant. Through this report, we confirm the commitment of the Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council members to work diligently on behalf of individuals with disabilities. We will continue to assist and advise MVR to empower all individuals with disabilities to achieve competitive employment and independence in their communities to the benefit of themselves and Montana.

Jackie Colombe, MVR Council Chairperson

Family of Rehabilitation Programs

Vocational Rehabilitation Services- This program provides services to assist, find or maintain employment for individuals who have a disability that creates significant difficulties in obtaining employment.

Blind and Low Vision Services- This program provides a broad range of services through three programs:

- (1) Vocational services are similar to the vocational rehabilitation program described above.
- (2) Visual Medical Services are for people who need medical treatment to prevent blindness, restore sight, or need other treatment where loss of vision cannot be prevented or sight restored. The program served 207 individuals in the last year.
- (3) The Older Blind Program provides services to older visually impaired or blind individuals so they can live more independently in their homes and communities. The program served 631 individuals in the last year.

Montana Telecommunications Access Program (MTAP)- This program provides services that include the distribution of special telephone equipment to Montanans who have disabilities that makes it difficult to use a telephone. The program also operates the Montana Relay, which makes it possible to place phone calls between standard phones and text telephones. The program served 802 individuals last year.

Extended Employment- This program provides ongoing support for individuals with severe disabilities to assist them keep employment. The Extended Employment program provides regular follow up at the job site. The program served 306 individuals last year.

Independent Living- This program provides services that promote consumer control; peer support; self-help; self-determination; equal access; and Individual and systems advocacy to maximize leadership, empowerment, independence, and productivity of individuals with disabilities. Full inclusion and integration of individuals with disabilities into the mainstream of American society is a primary goal of the program. The program served 1,421 individuals in the last year.

Success Story

A woman with macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy sought assistance to remain independent in her own home. The following services helped meet the goal: a special lamp assisted with testing for blood sugar levels as well as reading mail; specialized glasses assisted with reduced glare and maximized contrast and lighting; a hand and stand magnifier were tools that helped with reading; a reading stand freed her hands while reading; a low vision cordless phone helped to resolve her concerns regarding emergency contact in and around her home; large print materials assisted her with phone numbers and addresses; large print checks and a large button calculator assisted her in tracking finances; a writing guide assisted her in keeping her journal and other writing tasks; a watch that had a back light and large numbers along with a large red numbered alarm clock assisted her in monitoring time; large print cards with built in markers that slide allowed her to continue playing bingo at the senior center; and a binocular and monocular assisted with viewing the TV program menu and bird watching, a favorite activity.



She received mobility instruction from the agency orientation mobility specialist, and her wishes to travel safely were helped with a white support cane and instruction. The white support cane helped deal with arthritis in both her knees and it signaled to drivers that she was visually impaired.

The Disability Transitions Program transportation coordinator helped resolve transportation needs, which assisted the whole community. Other agency referrals were Talking Books Library and Montana Telecommunications Network.



Success Story

A VR counselor was proud that she had made a grown man cry not once, not twice, but three times! When she first met the man he was in pretty rough shape as things weren't going well in his life. He had anxiety and depression. When he and the counselor wrote his rehabilitation plan he was tearing up. He wanted to work towards a commercial driver's license (CDL) and the plan was going to help him do it. As he progressed on the plan, he felt better about life and he had a goal

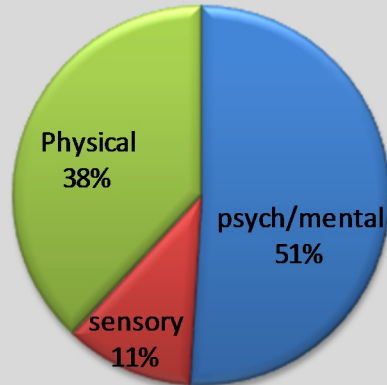
that was taking him in a positive direction. He chose to drive long haul because he enjoys driving and has no ties to the community.

After he received his CDL, it took some time before he and the job placement specialist were able to find a job. However, despite difficulties finding a job in a bad economy, he was hired by Battery Warehouse to deliver batteries. He has worked his way up to being in charge of the warehouse and now installs batteries and makes service calls, in addition to delivering batteries. He was emotional again when the counselor visited with him about the job. He is able to use his CDL, his coworkers are really nice and he has year round employment! He loves his job and he is very grateful for the services he received through VR.

That is only part of the story, Due to his pride, it took a lot of courage for him to ask for dentures. He has always been self conscience about the condition of his teeth and working with the public made it worse. When the dentist put his new teeth in he could not help but cry. His life has turned around for the better and he now walks tall with a huge smile!

2010 Vocational Rehabilitation Stats at a Glance

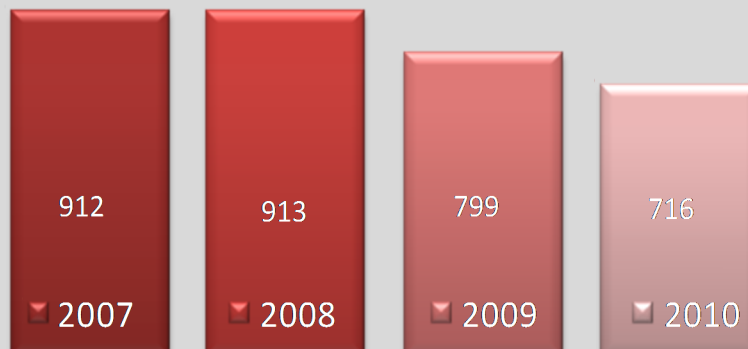
Type of Disability



Average Hourly Wage of MVR Placements by Year



Number of MVR Placements by Year



The number of MVR placements has decreased in the last two years, this concerned the agency and the council greatly. A review of situation indicated that increased staff turnover and the downturn in the economy were the primary factors involved. The agency expects improvements in both of these areas in the upcoming year. Therefore, an increase in placements is also expected.

BLACKFEET VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Six tribally controlled vocational rehabilitation projects are located in Montana. These projects are funded through federal funds and matching funds from the tribe through Section 121 of the Rehabilitation Act. Each year, the Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council presents the story of one of these projects in the annual report.

This year, Blackfeet Vocational Rehabilitation received a new grant award for an additional five years. This is the third successful grant for the program. In the past year, the program provided services to 82 consumers through Individualized Plans for Employment. The types of services provided include: books, supplies, and tuition for training (based on need after other student funding is assessed); equipment for trade occupations; hearing aids; dentures; work clothing; assistance in establishing small businesses; wheel chairs; computer equipment; and assistance with gas expenses to travel to rehabilitation services or work. The program sees training as a priority service so that the consumers are given the opportunity to be part of the competitive employment community. The program has assisted consumers obtain specific training such as Commercial Driver's License, Certified Nursing Assistant Certificate and General Equivalency Degree. Nineteen consumers became successfully employed in the last year. This is a significant accomplishment since the Blackfeet Reservation has an unemployment rate of 70%.

The program collaborates with other programs in the Blackfeet Manpower Program to sponsor the One-Stop Pow-Wow providing cultural services for consumers and the community. Blackfeet Vocational Rehabilitation collaborates with other rehabilitation services in the state including Montana Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind and Low Vision Services out of the Great Falls field office and the Client Assistance Program of Disability Rights Montana. Collaboration includes having joint cases with other agencies at times.

The program has four staff positions: a director, a coordinator, a counselor, and a receptionist. The program is part of the Blackfeet Manpower Program, which includes many other vocational and human service programs.



Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Programs

Blackfeet Manpower
PO Box 1090
Browning, MT 59417

Chippewa Cree Tribe VR
RR 1, Box 544
Box Elder, MT 59521

Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes VR
PO Box 278
Pablo, MT 59855

Fort Belknap Indian Community VR
RR 1, Box 66
Harlem, MT 59526

Fort Peck Assiniboine & Sioux Tribes VR
PO Box 1027
Poplar, MT 59255

Chief Dull Knife College VR Project
PO Box 98
Lame Deer, MT 59043

Vocational Rehabilitation Council

Recommendations:

- Develop an action plan for addressing unserved and underserved populations.
- With regard to collaboration with tribal rehabilitation projects, review current criteria and procedures for joint cases and transfer of cases and report out on best practices.
- Strengthen networking between MVR and other agencies such as Mental Health, Job Services, Developmental Disabilities, Veterans' Services, and Department of Corrections.
- Support and enhance policies and procedures to sustain an effective process of inservice training and professional development.
- Conduct activities that increase awareness and understanding of populations with unique needs. This would include planning one council meeting a year that focuses on this issue.
- Increase transportation options for Montanans with disabilities that impact employment opportunities for MVR consumers

Achievements:

- The Council provided input on MVR's changes to address the needs of youth with disabilities transitioning from high school to the adult service system. This included assisting with development of a cooperative agreement to be used by MVR counselors with local schools, efforts that have lead to increased numbers of transition students served, and the planning of a webinar on transition issues.
- The Council provided input on activities to assist with identifying unserved and underserved populations and provided outreach to community organizations to increase awareness of VR activities. These activities were carried out by a Council member.
- The Council provided input and guidance to the development of a new format for the annual report, which lead to a more attractive document.
- The Council provided input on the process used to hire the new Director of Disabilities Transitions Programs.
- The Council actively participated in the activities related to the comprehensive needs assessment that lead to MVR's new 3-year strategic plan.

Vocational Rehabilitation Field Offices

Missoula Regional Office
2675 Palmer, Suite A
Missoula, MT 59808-1700

Hamilton VR Office
316 N 3rd, Suite 109/110
Hamilton, MT 59840

Kalispell VR Office
121 Financial Dr, Suite B
Kalispell, MT 59901

Butte Regional Office
700 Casey Street, Suite B
Butte, MT 59701

Bozeman VR Office
220 West Lamme, Suite 1E
Bozeman, MT 59715

Helena VR Office
3075 North Montana Ave Suite 106
Helena, MT 59601

Great Falls Regional Office
201 1st St So, Suite 2
Great Falls, MT 59405-1884

Havre VR Office
48 2nd Avenue, Suite 213
Havre, MT 59501

Billings Regional Office
2121 Rosebud Dr Ste. C
Billings, MT 59102

Miles City VR Office
114 N 7th St
Miles City, MT 59301

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Charlotte Harasymczuk
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Chanda Hermanson
Helena

Dalayna Hillis
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Maureen Kenneally
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Sharla LaFountain
Lewistown

Carol Lambert
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<http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/voc rehab/rehabilitationcouncil/index.shtml>



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